

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

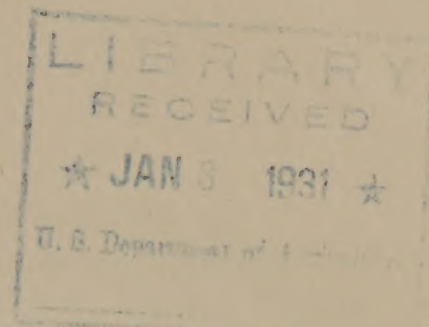
1-9
PG9 Ra

TIMELY GARDEN SUGGESTIONS

Christmas Day, 1930
W. R. Beattie and David Lumsden

Over Station WRC in Washington

- - - - -



Merry Christmas to Everybody. Merry Christmas to all the boys and girls who have been remembered by Santa Claus. Merry Christmas to Mother who worked late last night putting the finishing touches on the Christmas tree, and preparing the goodies for today's dinner, and merry Christmas to you Dad enjoying your Christmas at home.

I bring you, one and all, the Christmas greetings of the United States Department of Agriculture, extended through the courtesy and cooperation of Station WRC of the National Broadcasting Company. For many of us 1930 has been a year of trial and disappointment, but we have faith that 1931 may crown our efforts with a measure of success that is full to overflowing. May the promises of the year which is drawing to a close find their fulfilment in the year to come.

Today, most of you are gathered about your firesides enjoying the day surrounded by beautiful decorations that are appropriate to the Christmas holiday. A special significance is attached to each and every thing used on this occasion to make our homes bright and attractive. History and Romance lie back of it all, and today Professor David Lumsden of the Department of Agriculture is here to tell us about "Christmas Plants and Decorations." Prof. Lumsden. -

Christmas Plants

D. Lumsden.

As the festive season of Christmas and the New Year is now upon us our thoughts wander to the time honored custom of exchanging gifts. This custom indeed is truly a commendable one and one that has existed for a great many years and doubtless it will exist for many years to come. Gifts may take the form of most anything which one fancies or which one's friends are likely to fancy. Gifts which really appeal to the recipient are those which show thought and care on the part of the giver. Plants may be included among these gifts there being very few people indeed who would not cherish a well grown plant in their home.

What person living cannot remember how eagerly they looked forward to Christmas and with what joy they anticipated a visit from good St. Nicholas. The same spirit is with us as in the days of yore. The children anticipate their Christmas tree, their toys and games, the grownups their remembrances and the home still has its decorations. After all the modern Christmas is very like its predecessors. Neither time nor modern science has changed it. We may still proclaim it thus:

"Be merry all, be merry all,
With holly dress the festive hall;
Prepare the song, the feast, the ball
To welcome Merry Christmas."

Various evergreens including those of a berry bearing nature are used to decorate the home as a manifestation of the prevailing Christmas spirit. Among these plants we find the mistletoe, a plant much heralded in legend and lore. It is however interesting to note that although the various evergreens which are used to decorate the home are placed in positions without much forethought the mistletoe always adorns the chandelier or is suspended in some conspicuous place in the hall.

The mistletoe has been hallowed by history. It was set aside as a plant worthy of consideration by members of the ancient Gaulish or British order of priests known as Druids, who held it in particular veneration because not only its berries but its leaves grow in clusters of three to one stalk - to them a magic number. But even before given reverence by the Druids, mistletoe with its white waxen berries and evergreen leaves fitted into an interesting plot of Norse mythology. According to the legend Balden, the Scandinavian god of light, was exempt from harm by all things save the mistletoe and ultimately was slain by Hoeder with an arrow made of this wood. According to other legends the mistletoe brought good fortune as long as it did not touch the ground. Early European nations revered it as a ceremonial plant whence originated the old English custom of "kissing under the mistletoe" that has caused much fun and frolic and some romances in the past.

The botanical name of the American mistletoe is *Phoradendron flavescens*. The mistletoe is of parasitic nature appearing as a bush growth with a sucker root attached to the trunk or forked branches of many trees, such as the Poplar, Ash, Hawthorn, Apple and Linden, but rarely on the Oak contrary to common belief.

Favorite Holiday Plants

The Cyclamen

Of all the winter blooming plants in flower around Christmas, the well known Cyclamen takes the first rank. It is second to none. It is so attractive in leaf and beautiful in flower that few persons indeed can resist buying a plant and if we consider its good qualities as a house plant little wonder it is so popular.

The Poinsettia

The Poinsettia has been for years and still is to-day one of the ideal Christmas flowers. This is on account of its bright red bracts which surround its small yellow flowers. The Poinsettia was introduced into American Horticulture about 1838 by Joel Roberts Poinsett, a distinguished diplomat, cabinet officer serving under President Martin van Buren, and a lover of fine arts. He was born in Charleston, S.C. in 1779. To-day the plant is known botanically as *Euphorbia pulcherrima* but it is far better known to the general public as Poinsettia. It is a native of Mexico and that infers that at no time should it be subjected to a low temperature. When cut the bracts as well as the foliage will often wilt badly and when used for decorating is disappointing. This can be prevented to a great extent by putting the stems as soon as they are cut into very hot water.

Begonias

Begonias are popular as Christmas plants particularly the semi-tuberous section of which the popular varieties Melior, Gloire de Chate-laine, Glory of Cincinnati and Mrs. J. A. Peterson are representatives. Begonia Mrs. J. A. Peterson has dark colored bronze or reddish foliage. It is a desirable Christmas plant because of its habit, its bright colored pink flowers and the setting provided by its fine foliage. The other varieties possess green foliage and attractive pink flowers.

Heather

The Heather or botanically speaking the *Ericas* grown for winter decoration are native to the Cape of Good Hope. They are among the very best keeping flowers we grow. They are liked by all, rich and poor. On account of the very fine silk like texture of the roots the plants must never suffer from dryness. *Erica melanthera* makes an ideal Christmas plant. Its small bell shaped pink flowers are very attractive.

Christmas Cactus. Crab Cactus

In Europe and even in this country a few years ago *Epiphyllum truncatum* or the Christmas Cactus was included in the list of the most desirable Christmas flowering plants. Of late years the Poinsettia, Begonia and Azalea has largely replaced it. Nevertheless a grafted plant with a stem 6"-12" high is very attractive displaying its deep pink blossoms on the tips of its flat green foliage, the plant developing an umbrella like form.

Azalea

Azaleas are among the most beautiful of the Christmas flowering plants, their habit of growth and free flowering qualities commend them most highly to flower lovers. The varieties most popular for Christmas decoration are Vesvaneana, variegated pink and white; Deutsche Perle, white; Simon Mardner, pink; Mad. van der Crayson, deep cerise. These all belong to the Indian or Chinese section. Azaleas require a large amount of water while in flower. If they are allowed to wilt their blooms are quickly spoiled.

Primula (Primrose)

The Primulas are a genus of pretty dwarf plants several species of which are admirably fitted for the holiday decoration. Primula obconica heads the list. The improved strains which are now on the market are quite beautiful and they make showy pot plants. Primula sinensis, the Chinese primrose, makes a most desirable Christmas plant and one that always is a favorite with the flower buying public. The most popular variety around Christmas is the one having deep red flowers.

Japanese Christmas Berry

This plant is known to the florist as Ardesia crenulata. It is incomparably the best red berried house plant for Christmas decoration and it has the extraordinary merit of remaining in attractive condition for several years if properly cared for. The berries of the Ardesia actually remain in good condition on the plant for two whole years or more and it is not unusual to see a well grown plant displaying red berries, green berries and flowers at the same time. The berries and flowers are produced in whorls standing out in contrast to its dark green shiny foliage. The whole bearing of the Ardesia is singularly Japanese as if this gifted people had impressed upon it some of their best natural traits. In fact it almost seems an outgrowth of Japanese art rather than a product of nature. Like everything of surpassing merit the Ardesia has its limitations. It always will be costly for it takes two years to raise it from seed to bearing age and a specimen plant eighteen inches high having hundreds of berries often represents five years growth. No wonder the demand exceeds the supply of this berried aristocrat.

The Jerusalem Cherry

The Jerusalem Cherry belongs to the potato family. Its botanical name is Solanum pseudo-capsicum. It makes a compact plant from nine inches to one foot high covered with red berries each one half to three quarters of an inch in diameter. The berries are green at first then change to scarlet. This plant is one of the good berry bearing plants for Christmas decoration.

Peppers

Of late years the florists have been growing some of the small red peppers in pots for Christmas. The varieties usually grown are celestral and kaleidescope. They bear a profusion of small fruits from an inch to an inch and a half long. The fruits change from green to cream color and finally to bright red making a pleasing combination clustered among their dark green leaves.

Aspidistra lurida

This is the hardiest of all decorative plants and a plant which neither neglect nor kindness is very likely to kill. The species *lurida* and its variegated form is known to every cultivator of plants. It can endure more gas, heat and dust than most any other plant we grow. A nice specimen kept free from dust by occasionally sponging the leaves with soap and water is a very attractive object whether it is in the bright sun of the bay window or at the foot of a stairway where scarcely a ray of light can penetrate and where the icy air which strikes its leaves every time the door opens during the winter months seems to make little difference to the plant. Old and familiar as the plant is, it is always in great demand.

Ficus elastica (Rubber Plant)

The Rubber Plant has been considered one of the best of the decorative house plants mainly on account of its excellent keeping qualities. The species *elastica* has long been a favorite where decorative foliage plants are used.

Dracaena

Some very fine *Dracaenas* have been introduced to the public of late years. They make admirable house plants and are quite attractive. The species *massangeana* with its variegated yellow and green leaves and the species *terminalis* which in the early part of its growth develops green and bronze foliage later changing to shades of scarlet and crimson are both desirable Christmas plants.

Araucaria (Norfolk Island Pine)

This noble species of conifers, *Araucaria excelsa*, deserves to be more popular as a Christmas plant. Its symmetrical appearance reminds one very much of a Christmas tree, in fact it is often used as such for a table decoration. It may be kept from year to year and if proper attention is given to it regarding its cultural requirements it will develop into a stately plant.

Ferns

Ferns are always popular as gifts, the species most in evidence being the Boston Fern, *Nephrolepis Bostoniensis* and its varieties. For a semi-shady position in the home, this fern can not be beat.

Palms

Palms are the chief ornaments in the conservatories of the wealthy or in the room or sun parlor of the more humble home. The principal Palms of importance are *Kentia Belmoreana* and *Forsteriana*. They are known to the botanists as *Howea*. The plants when taken care of will stay in good condition for a number of years.

Pandanus Veitchii

This is considered one of the most beautiful of the variegated plants grown. It is often used with other plants in a basket arrangement and as a specimen house plant *Pandanus Veitchii* is without a peer.

I would like to have discussed with you the cultural treatment of the plants I have mentioned. Time however will not permit. During the brief period I have had at my disposal I trust that I have been able to call to your attention some of the best of the flowering and flowerless plants which fit in so nicely in the home decoration. Plants and flowers add grace to the mansion, the moderate villa and the more humble cottage home, where perhaps the pale mechanic or little storekeeper tending a few flowers realizes the truth of Keats' celebrated line, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever". Much sentiment might be expended on the pleasures to be derived from the cultivation of plants and flowers. Much might be written on the uplifting effect of the study, culture and arrangement of flowers and the joys that the sight of them is capable of raising in the hearts of the sorrowful and afflicted and more than enough said to justify the exclamation, "Give me a fine day and a flower garden and I will make ridiculous the pomp and pageants of emperors and kings". And now in closing I wish to extend to all our friends of the air the seasons greetings with best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Thank you Professor Lumsden, for your interesting story about the holly and the mistletoe and all the other Christmas decorations. I trust that Professor Lumsden's talk today, and other talks that are to follow in the Timely Garden series, may stimulate a greater interest in the planting and culture of evergreens and other ornamental plants about our homes to the end that Washington, and all the region reached by these broadcasts may be noted for its beautiful homes. In closing this program we bid you one and all a MERRY, MERRY, CHRISTMAS.